

# **A Survey of Visitors to *Infinity of Nations: Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American Indian* at the George Gustav Heye Center of NMAI, New York City**

May 2012

## **Abstract:**

Respondents to a survey at *Infinity of Nations: Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American Indian* were pleased with the exhibition and rated it highly. The rating was essentially identical to that of *A Song for a Horse Nation* both for US residents and international visitors and it exceeded the two-year overall experience average for the museum measured in 2009-2011. With respect to other aspects of the exhibition, it should be noted that even when restricted to US residents, the rating of *Infinity of Nations* is nearly identical to the Smithsonian average. US visitors rated the exhibition considerably higher than did international visitors. This difference is found generally at the Smithsonian, not just at NMAI New York. The data in this report also makes it clear that the experiences of US residents and international visitors differed in some key ways – not only in the experiences they found especially satisfying but also in the association between those experiences and rating. It is possible that the experiences of international visitors in Smithsonian exhibitions differ in some fundamental – but as yet unidentified – ways from the experiences of US residents.

On the basis of the study at NMAI New York, *Infinity of Nations* contains some interpretive strategies that were especially successful with US residents and may be transferable to another NMAI exhibition environment. In particular, the videos and interactive kiosks were utilized by nearly half of visitors and had a positive impact on their experiences.

If we look at the exhibition closely, we find that the experiences that the curatorial team considered important were reported by substantial percentages of visitors. The top five experiences were *Gaining information* (58%), *Seeing rare, valuable, or uncommon things* (55%), *Enriching my understanding* (51%), *Being moved by beauty* (46%), and *Getting a sense of the everyday lives of others* (31%). Except for *Enriching my understanding*, these percentages were considerably higher than were recorded at NMAI New York during the 2009-2011 study.